

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
February 1973

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

COMMUNIST LOGISTICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA
SINCE THE CEASE-FIRE

INTRODUCTION

1. On 27 January a formal cease-fire was declared to end the war in South Vietnam. Since that time, some significant logistics-related activities have been undertaken by the North Vietnamese. This memorandum summarizes the most important of these developments, and also includes some pre-cease-fire activity which relates to the continuing Communist resupply effort.

SUMMARY

2. Significant logistical support for Communist forces operating throughout Indochina has continued during the early days following the cease-fire, and indications are that plans have been made to extend such operations for at least the near term.

3. Renewed maritime shipping to North Vietnam's harbors is expected to gain momentum in the coming weeks. At Haiphong, minesweeping is under way, and vessels have been noted moving within the main channel. Recently, a 4,000 deadweight ton (DWT) ship left the harbor, and currently at least one Soviet ship has arrived at Haiphong. Along the northern coast, the lightering of foreign merchant ships was noted along the coast south of Hon Gay - the first such activity in that area since the mining. Also, along the southern coast, heavy watercraft activity in the Quang Khe area has been resumed by the North Vietnamese.

4. Overland imports into North Vietnam through 23 January were following roughly the same pattern as in previous months. Through that date, detected overland imports for the month stood at 26,000 tons.

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Economic Research.

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5. Within North Vietnam, significant progress has been made in restoring the battered rail system. The northeast line is currently serviceable as is the line from Hanoi to Vinh. COMINT implies that the latter line is now being used from Thanh Hoa to Vinh. Similarly the road network throughout North Vietnam is serviceable.

6. Intercepted North Vietnamese communications from the Vinh area show clearly that a high level of logistic activity is to be sustained there in the near future. From 1 to 22 February, some 6,600 tons of supplies are to be delivered to Binh Tram 11, the major Communist logistic entity in northern Laos. Further south, vehicle activity continues to be noted north of the DMZ. In the Laos border area, electronic sensors have detected large numbers of vehicles en route south through the Ban Karai Pass since the cease-fire, and in the central Laos Panhandle a 28 January intercept from the Tchepone area noted a 54-vehicle convoy on the move. On 28 and 29 January, some 24 tanks were observed by US pilots moving through the Muong Nong area.

7. Evidence of supply movement into South Vietnam itself has been scarce; however, one important intercepted message on 30 January was an order to a logistical element in the DMZ area to form a "vehicle command" for the future delivery of supplies to South Vietnam's Military Region (MR) I. Similarly, a 30 January intercept revealed an 11-truck convoy was on its way from a major logistic entity between Stung Treng and Kratie, Cambodia, to the COSVN area.

DISCUSSION

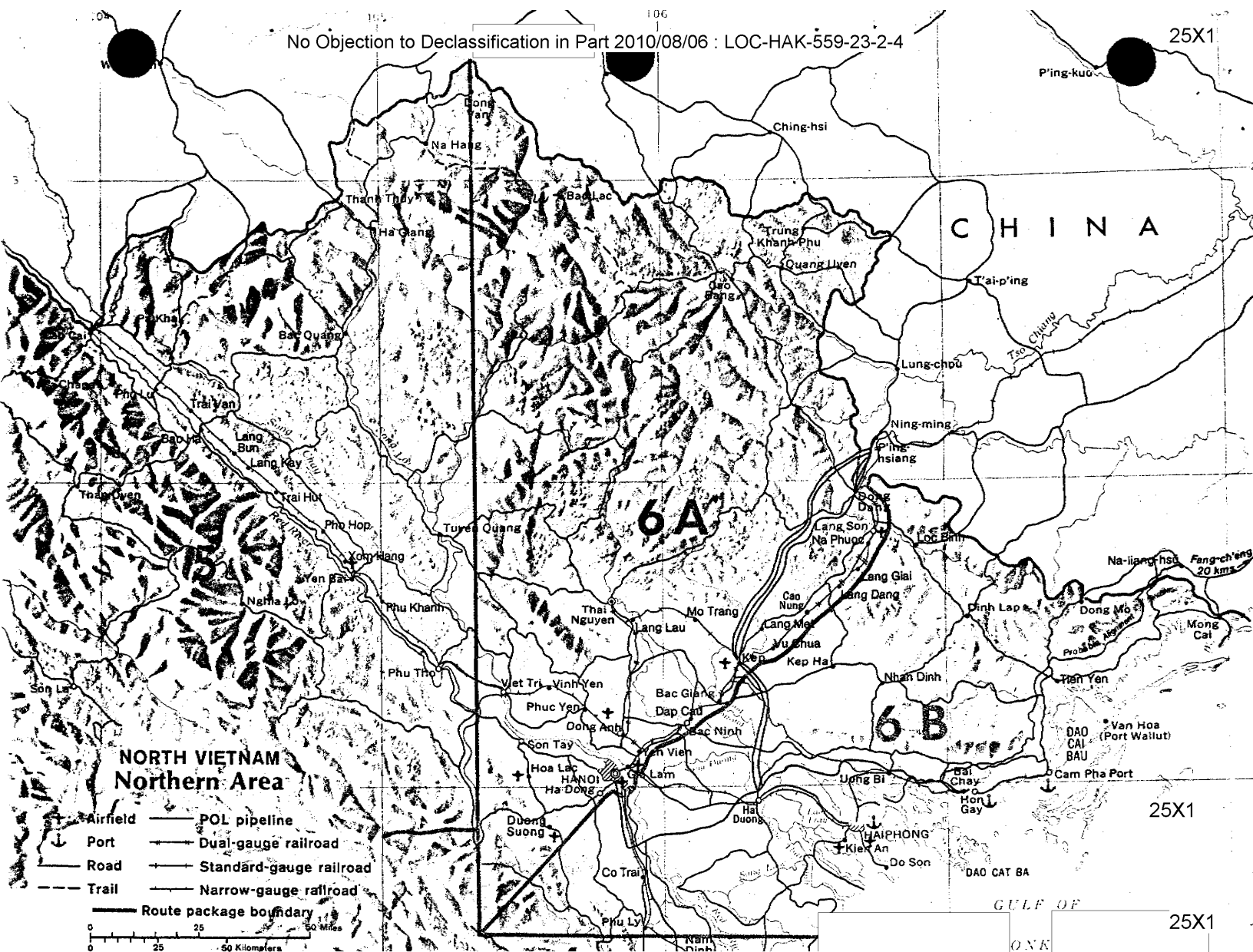
International Resupply to North Vietnam

8. Photography [] revealed two small vessels towing minesweeping gear outbound in the main channel of Haiphong harbor and two other small craft headed inbound in the channel. On the same day a tanker (probably the one that left the harbor's lower anchorage adjacent to the minefield between 21 and 23 January) was seen entering the channel behind a tug. These activities came on the heels of the recent undetected departure from Haiphong of the North Vietnamese cargo ship Viet Bao, which, at 4,000 DWT, is the largest ship to exit the harbor since the mining.

9. Photography [] also reflected the first observed lightering of foreign merchant ships along the northern coast of North Vietnam south of Hon Gay since the mining. Four cargo ships were observed in this area near Cac Ba Island: one Cuban (the Guisa), one Chinese, and two North Vietnamese ships, the Huu Nghi and the Ben Thuy which had left Haiphong in late November. On 25 January, two more Chinese ships

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appeared in the area and 18 barges were observed lightering cargo [redacted]

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[redacted]
29 January, COMINT revealed that the small Huu Nghi (600 DWT) had loaded export cargo for Hong Kong.

10. In other activity, COMINT indicates that one Soviet ship -- the Dalny -- has arrived at the harbor outside the minefield at Haiphong and by 3 February lightering from the ship had begun. By that date, 1,200 tons had been unloaded and 2,100 tons remained on board.

11. Although COMINT is not yet available on Hanoi's overland imports in the post-cease-fire period, reports through 23 January showed no significant shift in North Vietnam's import patterns. COMINT reflected nearly 26,000 tons of goods arriving by overland transport in January.

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12. [redacted] six probable armored vehicles were sighted in a new vehicle park north of the petroleum storage area at P'ing-hsiang, and, on the same date, about 150 SA-3 missile canisters were seen at a truck park near Dong Dang. [redacted] photography of the Dong Dang line about ten miles south of the Chinese border showed a 30-car train heading south with at least seven and possibly eight SA-3 launchers on board. In addition, two SA-3 launchers have been sighted at sites in North Vietnam, one at Phuc Yen Airfield [redacted] and the other just west of Hanoi [redacted]

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Reconstruction of Lines of Communication in North Vietnam

13. The North Vietnamese are making significant progress in the restoration of their rail system. The northeast rail line is now open, and the repair emphasis has shifted southward into the Panhandle.

14. By the time of the bombing halt the North Vietnamese had reopened the northeast line between the Chinese border and the Red River. At that point a combination fixed span/pontoon bypass bridge was used for rail movement into Hanoi. All railyards on the line were passable, with at least one track serviceable through each [redacted] additional repair work has been done on the northeast line: more through tracks have been opened at the larger yards such as Yen Vien and Lang Dang; at the Canal des Rapides Bridge near Hanoi, a temporary span has made the bridge serviceable; and, at the key Doumer Bridge all destroyed spans have been

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removed and damaged piers rebuilt. Moreover [] photography over the Yen Vien Railyard showed three prefabricated bridge spans on flat cars - they could be intended for use at the Doumer Bridge.

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15. On the Hanoi-Haiphong rail line the North Vietnamese have started and nearly completed reconstruction of a rail bypass bridge near Hai Duong West and have begun repairs to rail yards near Hai Duong and Haiphong. Initial preparations to begin the restoration of a rail bypass bridge on the western edge of Haiphong have also been noted.

16. The north-south rail line between Hanoi and Thanh Hoa has been restored for through rail service; however, neither the quality nor the speed of work that was evident before LINEBACKER II has been noted. The Phu Ly Rail Bridge was reopened [] and near Dong Phuong Thuong a bypass bridge has been repaired to accommodate rail traffic while repair of the main bridge has at least temporarily been abandoned. Repair and clearing on one approach to the Thanh Hoa Rail/Highway Bridge has also commenced.

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17. South of Thanh Hoa the rail line was sufficiently repaired by [] to permit through traffic to Vinh, despite significant remaining damage at some rail spurs and sidings along the line and at the Vinh railyard. This remaining damage will continue to limit the line's capacity.

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18. On the 75-mile-long Vinh-Cho Phong rail line, repair activity has centered on two places: the Bai Duc Thon Valley, some 20 miles north of the Mu Gia Pass; and an area some 35 miles northwest of Quang Khe. These sections of the line parallel the primary north-south road system and could be used in local shuttle operations. However, a complete restoration of this rail segment appears to be some time into the future, as several multi-span bridges remain to be rebuilt.

19. Since mid-January the North Vietnamese have also complemented their restored rail lines by rebuilding and adding highway bridges in their northern road net. Almost all major streams north of Thanh Hoa have serviceable highway bridges.

Logistic Activity in Southern North Vietnam

20. Evidence of Communist resupply activity within North Vietnam directed toward their tactical forces in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia showed some inconsistencies during the early days of the cease-fire. A recapitulation of activity in the central North Vietnam Panhandle immediately preceding the agreement revealed that from 23 to 26 January, nearly 2,300 tons of supplies - including 655 tons of ordnance and more than 1,000 tons of unidentified cargo - were detected in Binh Tram

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18 communications moving in the general Vinh area. A sharp decline occurred on 27 and 28 January when less than 150 tons of supplies were detected moving. A sharp decline in activity at vehicle checkpoints north of Vinh was also reflected in COMINT between 28 January and 1 February. Significantly, however, by 4 February vehicle reports had again increased: on that day some 227 vehicles were reported moving south in Binh Tram 18's area. And, on 3 February a Binh Tram 18 element reported that 45 vehicles were "bringing down all types of cargo."

21. In the southern Panhandle, significant Communist logistical activity continued to be noted. Between 26 and 29 January, heavy vehicle activity associated with the movement of artillery groups was detected in Binh Tram 26 communications. Included were more than 100 vehicles towing 24 37-mm antiaircraft weapons and two 122-mm weapons. More recent evidence of vehicle activity south of Vinh came on 30 January when a North Vietnamese unit in the Nghe An/Ha Tinh Province area reported that at least 18 vehicles had been dispatched on unspecified missions.

22. Along the southern coast of North Vietnam, photography of [] revealed a heavy concentration of watercraft in the Giang River at Quang Khe. Five SL-1 logistical craft – each capable of carrying 200 tons of cargo – four large 195-foot barges, and 12 oil barges were observed inside the river port area; and two SL-8 logistical craft (400-ton cargo capacities) were outside the river port area. Also, 15 miles northeast of Quang Khe at the Hon La anchorage, the 4,000-DWT coaster Viet Bao was observed. The current flurry of coastal activity parallels the post-ROLLING THUNDER experience in late 1968 when the North Vietnamese quickly opened their coasts and moved large quantities of supplies from Haiphong to the southern river ports.

23. Intercepted communications from Binh Tram 18 on 1 February revealed that extremely large cargo deliveries are scheduled for northern Laos during February. According to the intercept, 6,600 tons of cargo are to be shipped to northern Laos in two phases: more than 2,500 tons from 1 to 10 February and about 4,000 tons from 11 to 22 February. No composition of the supplies to be delivered was provided; however, Binh Tram 18 promised that it will "report the types of cargo later." This planned delivery reflects by far the largest shipments ever detected en route to northern Laos and is roughly double the quantity already detected moving there so far this dry season. Subsequent intercepts have indicated that these deliveries are under way. By 2 February, rail cars were reported arriving at Cho Si, carrying the cargo for dispatch to northern Laos. All of the cargo detected to date has been ordnance.

Logistical Activity in Laos and Cambodia

24. In the Laos Panhandle, moderate but consistent indications of logistical activity have been observed in COMINT since the cease-fire. Intercepted enemy communications from Binh Tram 32, operating in the Tchepone area, indicated one 54-vehicle convoy and a number of smaller convoys moving on 28 January, with a large number of vehicles remaining to be used for cargo shipment. On 2 and 3 February, intercepts from Group 472 in the central Laos Panhandle reflected continuing activity. Of 29 vehicles subordinate to a transportation company, all were reported "very active." In the same area, an element was noted "amassing a convoy", possibly associated with the movement of tank groups and supplies. Intercepted communications of 29 January indicated that work was in progress to remove blockages created by air attacks on Route 99 south of Tchepone so that vehicle traffic could be resumed. Intercepts also indicated that logistic units were requesting gasoline be shipped to keep supply vehicles moving.

25. Immediately preceding and since the cease-fire, COMINT has indicated that considerable emphasis is being placed on beefing up antiaircraft protection for Communist logistic entities operating in southern Laos. Artillery pieces have been observed transiting the southern North Vietnam Panhandle and moving into Laos, and artillery units have been detected already in place further south in the Laos Panhandle. On 26 and 29 January, there were detections of 39 new artillery pieces of unidentified type located in the Group 472 area. It was also disclosed on 28 January that a 30-man artillery detachment equipped with either 12.7-mm or 14.5-mm weapons was being sent to Binh Tram 34 in order to increase the Binh Tram's capability against low-flying reconnaissance aircraft.

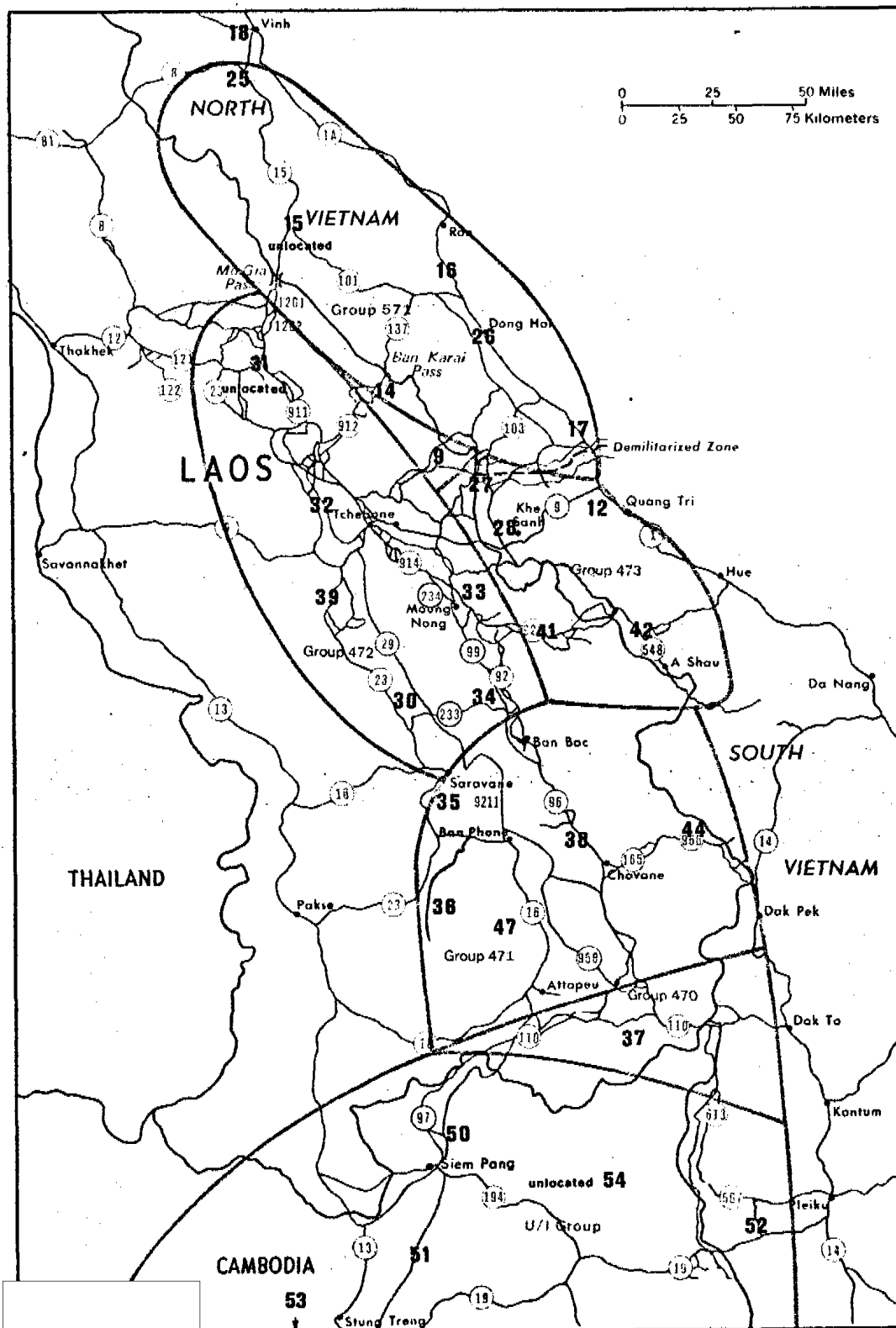
26. Other sources generally corroborate the COMINT reporting of continuing resupply activity underway in southern Laos. Through 4 February the overall traffic moving into southern Laos from North Vietnam has not changed significantly since the start of the cease-fire. The most active road has been Route 137 located just north of Ban Karai Pass. Similarly, in the western DMZ area, sporadic southbound traffic has been noted, including 18 vehicles moving southbound on Route 92B on 29 January.

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27. Limited aerial reconnaissance of the road net in the Laos Panhandle shows most major roads in fair to good condition and supporting vehicle traffic through 4 February.* On 28 and 29 January, forward air

* There has been little aerial reconnaissance over the Pass areas or on the feeder routes into South Vietnam during the period.



controllers reported that tanks were moving through the Panhandle: six were reported on Route 92 south of Muong Nong on 28 January and 18 on Route 92C north of Muong Nong the following day. Other reporting by forward air controllers on 29 January revealed seven trucks moving south on Route 99 east of Saravane and the spotting and subsequent destruction by tactical aircraft of five camouflaged vehicles on Route 964 northwest of Chavane.

28. Some new road construction in the central Panhandle has also been reported by forward air controllers. On 29 January, one reported observing a new by-pass road on Route 111, 4 miles southeast of Ban Kengkok and 25 miles south-southwest of Muong Phalane. The North Vietnamese also have undertaken extensive trellising on Route 96B from Chavane northward for a distance of 8 miles. This activity, a favorite means used by the Communists to hide logistical activity, may indicate that future activity along that route is expected.

29. Recently available photography [] revealed a new segment of the petroleum pipeline under construction in southern Laos. The pipeline was observed crossing the Se Kong River some 6.7 miles northeast of Ban Phone. South of the river, the pipeline extended northeast for a distance of 1.5 miles where it was obscured by dense tree canopy. This is the furthest south the pipeline has been observed in Laos.

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30. In extreme southern Laos, it appears that large amounts of fuel and petroleum are in storage in the Group 470 and Binh Tram 37 areas and will be available for the continuing movement of cargo into South Vietnam. A report of 23 January indicated that Group 470 was to receive 100 tons of diesel fuel on 27 January, and disposition reports of 26 January from Binh Tram 37 showed more than 550 barrels of fuel in possession of the Binh Tram and its subordinate units.

31. Information from northeastern Cambodia has been extremely sparse, with virtually no reporting by forward air controllers or aerial photography available since 27 January. COMINT has, however, revealed occasional activity: on 30 January, 11 vehicles were detected entering Binh Tram 53 en route to southern South Vietnam.

Logistical Developments in South Vietnam

32. Some resupply activity also has been noted within South Vietnam. Most significantly, a 30 January message from Binh Tram 12 in Quang Tri Province ordered another major logistic entity near the DMZ to form a "vehicle command" unit in order to facilitate the southward movement of supplies. The unit was directed to deliver supplies southward along Route 1 and into Quang Tri Province and the B-5 Front. This activity

follows an apparently large supply push into MR 1 immediately preceding the cease-fire. Communist vehicular and construction activity near Route 1 between Quang Tri and Hue was reflected in 29 and 30 January COMINT. And, in MR 3, the transport of food and quartermaster supplies between North Vietnamese units in the Parrot's Beak area was disclosed.

A Note on Northern Laos

33. There were only light indications of logistic activity in northern Laos during the reporting period, but photography and COMINT showed preparations being made to support future logistics movements. As already noted, extremely large supply deliveries from North Vietnam are planned for northern Laos during the period 1 to 22 February. In the Plaine des Jarres region, the North Vietnamese 25th Engineer Battalion is still active and was detected transporting a small amount of cargo. An intercepted message of 28 January reported 11 vehicles passing an unlocated checkpoint, and communications the following day indicated a number of vehicles transporting rice and explosives.

34. In the eastern Plaine, [] photography indicated that enemy road work was in progress on a short segment of Route 72 to the west of Nong Het. Further north, in Sam Neua Province the North Vietnamese 1st Engineer Regiment was reportedly in the process of constructing a "terminal" on Route 6. COMINT of 29 January from an unidentified rear service element in the area of Route 61 revealed instructions to the element to meet a "truck convoy" on that day. In Luang Prabang Province a 21 January intercept from Binh Tram 24 (operating along the Nam Ou River) indicated that 22 barrels of petroleum products had been shipped to an associate of the Binh Tram. The Binh Tram also received approximately 15 tons of foodstuffs on 26 January.

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